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Notes and Queries.

To the Editor of the Crayon:

I ASK the privilege of the use of your columns for the elucidation of a question of classical interpretation, which is also one regarding the external appearance of Nature, and so falls within the sphere of the artist as much as it does in that of the scholar, and is, therefore, more likely to find a fit solution among the readers of THE CRAYON than in any other journal.

It relates to the meaning of a passage of Virgil, on the interpretation of which the commentators and the translators (including among the latter some illustrious names) agree or nearly so; and yet it seems to me both the literal sense of the words and the daily observation of Nature contradict their interpretation, and indicate quite a different one. The passage is this. In the first book of the *Æneid*, lines 605-610, the Trojan chief, in expressing his gratitude to Dido for her kind reception of his storm-tost followers, thus concludes:

"In freta dum fluvii current, dum montibus umbræ
Lustrabant convexa, polus dum sidera pascet,
Semper honos, nomenque tuum laudesque manebunt."

The general meaning is clear enough—that the queen's honors, and name, and fame will last as long as the rivers flow into the sea, as the stars adorn the skies, or the shadows fall on the mountains. But it is the precise sense of these last words, in the original, "dum montibus umbræ lustrabant convexa," which I wish to have settled.

The question rose thus: some weeks ago, a bright school-boy consulted me as to the proper and precise translation of these words. I answered without hesitation that it was this, "As long as shadows move around the prominences of the mountains," meaning by *convexa* both the summits and the projections of mountains. I referred him at the same time, as a practical exemplification of the poet's sense, to the mountains of Dutchess Co., then in full view, where with the sun's varying position the deep shadows fell in different directions, from early morning to sunset. But he told me, to my surprise, that this did not seem to be the meaning given in the notes to the Virgil he used at school. The conversation taking place in a library pretty well stored with classical and poetical literature, I turned to the commentators at once, but was much surprised to find old Ræus, the excellent Delphin editor of Virgil, and indeed one of his best commentators, interpret the *umbræ* of the shades of the trees on the mountain, "Quam diu umbræ arborum coronabunt cacumina montium." This worthy French Jesuit, thought I, was more familiar with the shades of his convent library than with those of mountains. Had that close observer of Nature, his brother Jesuit, Vanier, the author of my favorite "Prociuum Rusticum," and the most original and natural of modern Latinists, been at his elbow, he would have given him a better interpretation. But let us see what Heyne, the most celebrated of modern Virgilian editors, will say. Again, I was surprised by finding that the learned Gottingen professor thus paraphrased the phrase, "donec in montibus umbræ silvarum 'convexa' montium, h. e., latera et ambitus obscurabunt," etc., referring the shadows to the shades of the woods, varying with the position of the sun.

Having been thus disappointed in the commentators within my reach, and they were of the very highest authority, I was still unconvinced that the poet had any reference

whatever to the shades of mountain trees, and resorted to the poetical translators in the confidence that their observation of Nature would have led them to the true sense. But no. "Glorious John Dryden," in his unequal and paraphrastic, but always animated and vigorous version, thus translates:

"While rolling rivers into seas shall run,
And round the space of heaven the radiant sun,
While trees the mountain tops with shade supply,
Your honor, name, and praise shall never die."

The rival poetical version of the more liberal Pett was found quite as unsatisfactory.

There was also at hand the French poetical version of De Lille, the "poet of Nature," he was called in his day in France; but he was rather the elegant poet of trim gardens and Versailles-like grounds. He has nothing to say here about mountains—woods, or trees, but he thus mystifies the thought in a cloudy vagueness, seeming to make the poet refer to a sunset behind mountains.

"Tant que de haut des monts la nuit tiendra ses voiles."

I have since that time looked into the two editions with English notes, which are the most popular in schools. One is that of Cooper, who objects to Ræus's "shadows of trees;" but thinks that the poet meant "the clouds surrounding the tops of high mountains." The other is that of Professor Anthon, who, in his translation, seems to me nearly correct. "As long as the shadows of mountains shall traverse the projecting sides of the same;" but in his interpretation he goes back to the shadows of trees, "i. e., says he, as long as the shadows thrown from the forests on the mountains shall darken the sides of the same, as they move around with the sun," etc.

As the learned New York Professor states in his preface, that his notes will be "found to contain all that is valuable in the commentaries of the latest European editors, as Nohder, Heinrich, Hohler, Thieb, Forbiger, and Valpy;" and that he has especially followed the recent edition in Germany, by Wagner, whose "noble work" on Virgil he specially commends, I presume that all these learned commentators concur in the explanation of forest shades, which I cannot believe to be correct.

Now, I can find nothing about forests in the original, and their introduction seems to me, who have looked on mountains with their deep and changing shadows, all my life, to alter and weaken the poet's meaning. It is evident, to me that Virgil meant the broad and deep shadows, which are cast from the mountain summits, now on one side, now on the other; and from all their prominences (for *convexa* includes both), in different directions, or not at all, according to the hour of the day and the season of the year. These effects must have been familiar to the poet's eye from his childhood, for a great part of his life seems to have been spent within sight of the Apennines; and these, I may add, were probably as bare of trees in his day as they are at present.

But whether his mountains were crowned with woods or not, still the variations of the shadows cast by the forest, whether in masses, or by the single forest trees, are but occasional, and not necessary incidents, of mountain scenery. On the other hand, the appearances of large portions, or even the whole side of a mountain-range seen all bathed in glowing light, or else in total or partial shade, "now in glimmer, now in gloom," are among the grander features of Nature,

and worthy to be associated (as in my judgment they are in this passage) with the ceaseless flow of mighty rivers into the sea, and the slow and silent movement of the stars.

Virgil was one of the most picturesque of poets, perhaps the most picturesque of the classical poets—the one who looked most upon Nature with the eye a landscape-painter. I cannot doubt that he was as familiar with all the phases of the Apennines as our own Cole was with those of his Catskills, at whose feet he dwelt, and from which his genius drew daily inspiration. Neither the poet-artist nor the painter would, in portraying the grander aspects of nature, have thought of substituting the shades cast either by trees or by forests in their mass, which can be measured by feet or yards, with those gigantic shadows thrown in broad day one way or the other from every jutting mount, or boldly projecting rock; and which, in early morning or before sunset, are thrown by the mountain mass itself, and cover alternately their whole eastern and western slopes.

Though the commentators and translators are against me, I am not solitary in my opinion. I have stated my question to two of the best authorities to be found anywhere—one a great poet, the other an excellent painter, both of them good Latinists as well as close observers of that nature they have, in different ways admirably described, and both pronounce my interpretation to be the only true one.

Should this meet the eye of my friend Weir, who looks hourly from his mountain home at West Point on the changing shadows of the Highlands of the Hudson, he will add his authority; and so, indeed, as it seems to me, must every one familiar with mountain scenery, whatever learned commentators or city-bred poets may say to the contrary.

But I submit the question to the judgment of your readers, whether scholars or artists, or, what I am glad to say, is no uncommon union in this country, to those entitled to judge in both capacities.

Yours,

V.

Editor of the Crayon—

CAN any of your correspondents or readers inform me when and whence the word *Vendue* came into our language. It is, I believe, originally American, for it is not to be found in any English Dictionary until those published within a few years. It is not in Bailey, Johnson, Walker, Richardson, or any other before Webster. I had supposed it to be either of old legal use from the Norman-French, or else provincial. With the first view I consulted Jacob's Law Dictionary, but in vain, and was equally unsuccessful in Halliwell's Provincial English Dictionary. I believe that it is not used by any native English writer, but it has the high authority of our Franklin. It has long been in use in this country, but is now, I think, more generally used in the country than in cities. Farmers in the State of New York all speak of Vendues and Vendue-masters, which in the city are ordinarily changed to *auction* and *auctioneer*, though *Vendue* keeps its place on the red flags used at furniture sales.

The word is a good one, and we have authority in plenty for its use in our laws and best writers, but what I am curious to know is the history and pedigree of the word—whether it is not of Scotch or of Dutch origin, and whether it is intelligible to an Englishman?

QUERY.

Architecture.

"OUR BUILDING STONES."

AFTER having found that when the sandstone and marble are associated together in the Trinity church-yard, the latter only is much decayed; after having pointed out numerous instances where sandstone buildings are fast crumbling to ruin; after reasoning that while all stones are alike ruined by fire, none can have a useful advantage, and demonstrating that, from its natural composition it must necessarily be frail and temporary, my friend C. is again found in the March number of *THE CRAYON* replying to me, eight columns long, and still insisting upon the superiority of that temporary paste, called by a kind of derisive justice, *sand-stone*. Next to the man who would build his house upon the sand, I know of none more unwise than he. To rescue freestone from the contempt into which it is fast falling might seem a useful task, but the attempt to advance its claims above those old stone heroes, granite and marble, seems to me preposterous; and so I shall not hereafter write anything more upon the subject, believing that the public have already made up their verdict upon the matter, while as to C. and myself it is of no great consequence what we may say or believe.

I cannot, however, refrain from some comments upon C.'s last paper. He reluctantly admits there "*was*" a crack in the front of the Trinity Church edifice, and calls my statement, that there is one "injurious." I do not see how this state of the case can redound to the credit of either the church or its sandstone material—C. seems very sensitive about that old puttied-up seam.

Having marched down, at C.'s request, to St. Peter's Church, and acknowledging the significance of his discoveries in its foundations, I would now like to march him up to that very Historical Society building which he so lauds, and there, over a large window, on the north side, he will find a large piece of Nova Scotia sandstone, disgracefully broken, apparently by its own weight. It may be by this time mended, and this "damaging" mention of the "was cracked," impertinent and out of place.

So it seems they put India-rubber coats on the granite columns in Paris, to keep them from the weather. Where on earth could C. have got this story from? I have seen and leaned against the obelisk of Luxor many hundreds of times, but never discovered this costume.

C. is a curious reasoner. To disprove my statement about the composition of sandstone, he quotes the analysis of two distinguished authorities, one of whom, my old friend and teacher, Prof. Cleaveland, says it is "united by a cement, calcareous, marly, argillaceous, or even silicious"—while the other, Prof. Hays, says it is cemented by a "silicate of proto-peroxide of iron," which latter is, to be sure, not very far from what I have maintained. Is not this process of proving me wrong, rather "*Hibernicè*?"

R.